

ShowTalk



Answering Service

Q. Lately your column has been delving into the past — which is great — but I also like to read about up-and-coming stars. How about a rundown on the life and career of that beautiful young star, Virginia Madsen?

U.G., Louisville

A. Happy to oblige, since Madsen is one of my favorites among the up-and-comers.

She was born and raised in the Chicago area, where her father is a firefighter and her mother a filmmaker. Madsen laid her own plans for a film career at an early age and has been going like a house afire ever since.

"What surprises me is that everything I projected it," she has said.

While still in high school in Winnetka, Ill., Madsen began private drama lessons and attended summer classes in theater at Northwestern University. She did some commercials in Chicago and, in 1983, was cast in a small role in a film being made there — "Class," with Rob Lowe. Next came a leading role in "A Matter of Principle," a PBS film directed by Alan Arkin and also shot in Chicago.

After moving to Los Angeles (where her older brother Michael had found work in movies and as a regular on TV's "Our Family Honor"), Madsen was promptly cast as Princess Irulan in "Dune." Next came the film in which the almond-eyed actress won my heart: "Electric Dreams" (1984), an underrated romantic fantasy



Shirley MacLaine and Andrei Konchalovsky (on the set of "Runaway Train"), above; Virginia Madsen, right.

with Madsen as Madeline, a comely cellist courted by a computer.

Madsen hasn't been nearly as well used in her subsequent films, "Creator," "Fire With Fire" and the recent, moronic "Modern Girls." But she landed a couple of plum television roles: the dictator's mistress in "Mussolini: The Untold Story," opposite George C. Scott; and actress Marion Davies in "The Hearst/Davies Affair," opposite Robert Mitchum as publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst. Her next movie is "Slam-dance" with Tom Hulce and Kentuckian Harry Dean Stanton.

Q. After reading Shirley MacLaine's "Dancing in the Light," I wondered if the real name of her Russian lover, called "Vassy" in the book, was ever revealed.

H.F., Louisville



A. It is an open secret — acknowledged by MacLaine herself — that Vassy is director Andrei Konchalovsky ("Runaway Train," "Duet for One"). MacLaine has said that she allowed her ex-flame to read the book in advance and gave him the option of whether his real name should be used. He had difficulty deciding, and it was that vacillation that inspired her to call him Vassy.

Q. It really steams me when movie theaters don't have clocks in the lobby. Not everybody carries a watch, you know. What possible reason could a theater have for not letting their customers know the time? (Is it because they don't want you to know how late you are for the movie?)

M.M., Louisville

A. Beats me. Maybe some theater-management types can

provide some explanation — or, failing that, some prominently displayed timepieces.

BackTalk

"I've been kicking around an idea," writes Leslie Jackson of Louisville. "It's the combination of various television actors and characters. What triggered it was the thought of what fun it would be to see René Auberjonois and Leonard Frey together. Since they look alike, they could play brothers or cousins — antagonistic to each other until Dabney 'Buffalo Bill' Coleman tries to horn in on their scams.

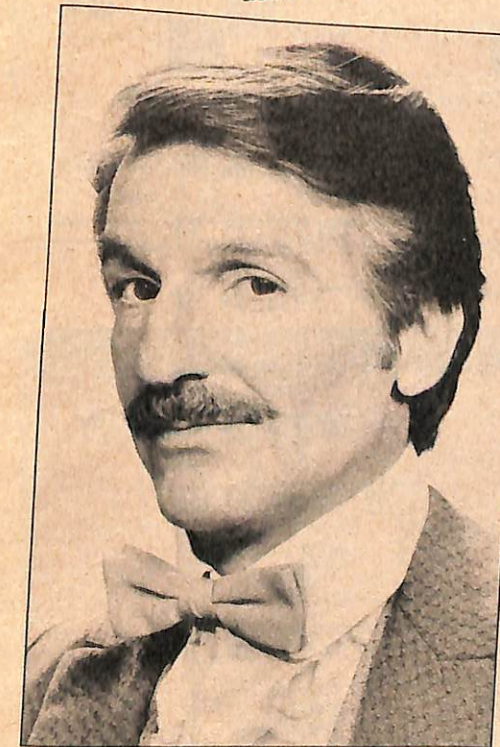
"Frey reminds me of 'Best of the West.' Don't you think 'Frog' [Tracey Walker] on that show must have been an ancestor of Darryl and Darryl on 'Newhart'?"

And, speaking of Bob Newhart, did you happen to catch 'St. Elsewhere' the night Jack Riley was in the mental ward, playing Mr. Carlin from 'The Bob Newhart Show' and still tormenting Oliver Clark just as he did in the old days? They never did explain how he got from Chicago to Boston.

"One of the things I like about 'St. Elsewhere' is the way they play these jokes — quietly and with a straight face. A good example is when Clark, as John Doe No. 6, thinks he is really Mary



René Auberjonois, the Guv's persnickety assistant on "Benson."



Leonard Frey, the crooked saloonkeeper on "Best of the West."

Richards after watching reruns of 'The Mary Tyler Moore Show.' In the hall, he sees Betty White, who is playing a Navy doctor, and addresses her as Sue Ann Nivens [the character she plays on 'MTM']. Betty, bless her, says with a straight face: 'Never heard of her.' Then there was the time the doctors from 'St. Elsewhere' stopped in the bar from 'Cheers' for a nightcap.

"Another combination I would like to see involves fantasy upon fantasy — Snoopy and Garfield together. Odie is such a pushover for Garfield that it would be fun to see him tangle with a real opponent.

"The above is just playing games, but there is one combination I would seriously like to see: Hawkeye Pierce of 'M*A*S*H' meeting up with Jessica Fletcher on 'Murder, She Wrote.' After all, Crabapple Cove and Cabot Cove can't be very far apart. Hawkeye — older and a little subdued, but not too — would be a contemporary of Jessica's, and sparks could fly.

"I'm sure other readers can come up with more — and better — ideas. I can't take TV too seriously; preserve me from Joan Collins!"

Chatter

Say it isn't so: That many movie theaters around the country are beginning to show commercials . . . That plans are afoot for Ted Turner to colorize the black-and-white portions of "The Wizard of Oz" . . . That NBC will produce a miniseries version of the magnificent 1956 movie "Giant." Pity the poor souls who attempt to fill the boots of director George Stevens and James Dean as Jett Rink . . . That Ryan O'Neal and Farrah Fawcett will try to make us forget Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in a small-screen version of Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" . . . That — after Barbara Stanwyck walked out because of the outlandish, boring scripts — an episode of "The Colbys" has her dying in a plane crash in India and the clan gathering for a memorial service, although a body has not been found. With Stanwyck out of the picture, such a service should be held for the ABC series itself.

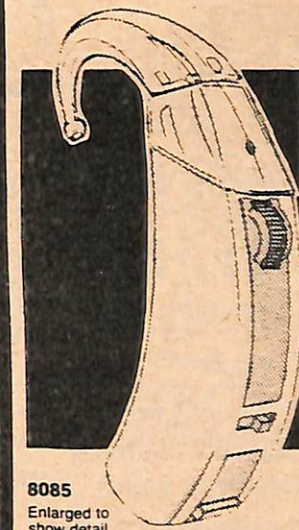
Mail questions to "ShowTalk," The Courier-Journal Magazine, 525 W. Broadway, Louisville, Ky. 40202. The number of questions and the time required to research the answers make it unfeasible to handle telephone inquiries. Questions selected for publication will be those with the widest general interest.

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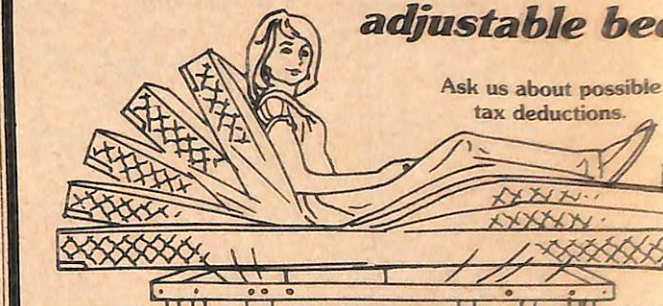
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